DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 277 FL 023 472

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TITLE The Comic Book as Course Book: Why and How.
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (29th, Long Beach, CA, March 26-April 1, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; *Comics (Publications); *English (Second Language); *Instructional Materials; Intensive Language Courses; *Interpersonal Communication; Language Skills; Learning Motivation; *Media Selection; Second Language Instruction; Skill Development
IDENTIFIERS *Authentic Materials

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how comic books are used as instructional materials in an intensive English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) course and discusses the rationale for using them. The students in the course have low-intermediate English language skills with limited discourse and interactive competence. Comic books are used because they are authentic, highly visual, culturally current, use a constant register, and contain limited lexical phrases. Analysis of the language in the specific text used, a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon collection, shows three categories: non-grammar (words and phrases whose meaning can be recovered relatively easily), words, and suprasegmentals (intonation, contrast) and sounds. Nonverbal cues are also found. It is noted that these elements, illustrated in several comic strips from the book, are not often found in traditional second language textbooks. The approach used by the teacher is to guide students in hypothesizing about the language in the cartoons, raise awareness of pragmatics, and emphasize the underlying regularity of language. Student translation of strips into English is used to highlight the role of other elements than lexicon in understanding the text and context. (MSE)

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Presented at the 29th Annual
TESOL Convention
Long Beach, CA
March 28–April 1, 1995

ED 390 277

THE COMIC BOOK AS COURSE BOOK: WHY AND HOW

This paper will describe how a comic book has been used in class to raise student awareness of certain aspects of applied linguistic theory which are often ignored in traditional ESL course books (e.g interactional aspects of spoken language (Brown and Yule, 1983) or lexical phrases (Lewis, 1993, Nattinger and DeCarrico, 1992).

The comic book is used in a very specific context:

a) in an INTENSIVE program; classes meet 20 hours a week,

b) in a course where use of the comic book is complementary to other teaching, not a substitute for it (though many exercises are based on the description of language gleaned from the comic book); and

c) with students (officially classified as 'low intermediate') who already have notions of English; they have already studied it at school in their home country, typically for six or seven years. They can and do score very high on multiple choice grammar tests, and can and do quote grammar rules verbatim in L1. Their discourse/interactive skills, however, are rudimentary at best; whenever they speak (IF they speak at all) they are unable to string more than three English words together without using a dictionary. We might say these students have 'plateaued', since their major complaint seems to be that they are always studying the same thing in their classes, over and over and over.

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Why the comic book as course book?

So why use a comic book as a course book? First and foremost, the comic book used (the Calvin and Hobbes collection, *Yukon Ho!* by Bill Watterson) is AUTHENTIC English, written for English–speaking Americans, rather than doctored for ESL students. As such it is a true TEXT book (or a book of texts, if you will). As they read it students are exposed to English as a WHOLE, and not the simplified collection of structures presented in a linear fashion which is the staple of most ESL course books. Furthermore, this comic book (roughly 16,131 words, in 1380 frames in 285 strips) is a far richer resource for these ESL students than other sources of authentic English, such as novels, newspapers or film (either as a dialogue or as a script). To explain why this should be so, it becomes necessary to look at the attributes of comic books:

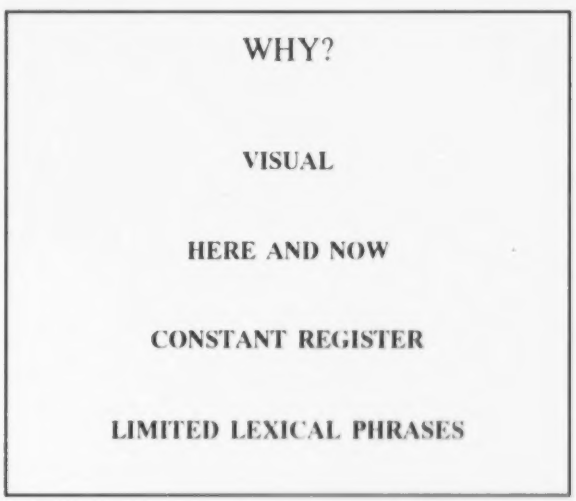

Figure 1. Why the comic book.

First, cartoons have a **permanent, visual** component (unlike movies, which are visual

but time-bound (language is only caught fleetingly as the action progresses); or dialogue, which is permanent, but not visual). Characters **interact** in a here and now (*you and me* not the *him and her* of narrative), and share many of the paralinguistic aspects of interaction (much of what the characters are saying can be inferred from expressions on faces, or from posture).

Next, comic book language lies about halfway between real spoken English and "written" English. While it is missing much of the pause phenomena, false starts, overlapping and whatever of unrehearsed speech, it DOES reflect real people speaking real English, and contains frequent examples of 'interactional language' (after Brown & Yule, 1983; this term will be explained later).

Third, within this language, there is a continuity of register through the fact that the characters are always the same, and always in the same social context with regard to power/intimacy relations. (In *Yukon Ho!* there are no more than 5 regular characters: two parents, their son, the son's best friend (who's imaginary), and the girl next door).

Fourth, and finally, the language represents one man's idiolect (that of Bill Watterson, the writer) and so is rich in fixed collocations (limited to one man's experience of the world, so limited enough for students to be able to handle), which come round again and again in different contexts.

The comic book as a source of interactional language.

Brown and Yule (1983) divide language into two functional categories:

> That function which language serves in the expression of 'content' we will describe as **transactional**, and that function involved in expressing social relations and personal attitudes we will describe as **interactional**. (p.1, original emphasis).

Although some of what Brown and Yule term interactional language IS presented in ESL course books, albeit in a cursory way (e.g. as formal/informal expressions of certain language "*functions*"), much of what characterizes spoken discourse is left out of them, (as indeed, much is omitted from Brown and Yule's description of discourse). This, of course, is because, to date, no adequate description of everything we do when we talk has yet been elaborated, a point made in Brazil, 1995: "[e]xisting definitive grammars do not explain everything ... uncertainty [is] a fact of the linguist's life" (p.1)

What follows is a subjective list of some aspects of spoken discourse, and a description of how the comic book is a useful avenue to lead students to explore them. This list is presented in tabular form in figure 2 – *Categorizing the language of Calvin and Hobbes*.

[Figure 2. about here(CATEGORIES)]

A: "Non Grammar"

The first category of aspects in the list is of 'ungrammatical' expressions where the original formal grammatical meaning can be recovered fairly easily. These fall into two groups:

1) what we might call *LOOSE REFERENCE:* – where cohesive ties (Halliday and

Language Categories

A: **"Non-Grammar"**

– [+ recoverable meaning]

"Loose reference": *mandibles of death, that's what he's got ¦ It works much better with a twenty ¦ that's it. ¦ Isn't it cute how...*

Ellipsis: *See the jets? ¦ Hard to believe.... ¦ What's it look like? ¦ Care to repeat..? ¦ Beats me. ¦ Girls are like slugs. They probably serve some purpose, but it's hard to imagine what.*

Blends: *Gotcha. ¦ Outta my WAY! ¦ Leggo. ¦ I dunno.*

– [+ "I"]

Mitigators: *I guess... ¦ Maybe.... ¦ ...., maybe. ¦ ... kind of ... ¦ .... sort of.... ¦ ol'+ noun (?)*

Comments: *Wow! ¦ Boy! ¦ Oh boy! ¦ Oh brother. ¦ Geez,... ¦ Rats.¦ Phooey. ¦ [BELIEVE IT + ?/N'T]*

Opinions: *I think... ¦ I take it.... ¦ [person]'d better... ¦ It's about time...*

Lexical phrases: *I'll say. ¦ What do you say? ¦ I take it...*

"Synonyms": *How come.../why.../what .... for? ¦ Suppose.../say.../what if...? ¦ yeah,/yup./you bet!*

Intensifiers, *real [+adj] ¦ sure [+verb] ¦ heck! ¦ get [PREP]!(Cf.[ACTION VERB] [PREP]!)*

B: **"Words"**

Lexis [general]

Verbs: LET/GET/MAKE/TURN/DO/BE/HAVE
Particles and Prepositions: UP/IN/OFF/THROUGH

Nouns: *accident / turn of events*

Lexis [vague]

*stuff ¦ ....and stuff. ¦ ....or something. ¦ ... and everything. ¦ the/this (*) thing ¦ the (whole) * bit. that's it! ¦ that's it. ¦ that's good. ¦ that's a relief. ¦ the * incident ¦ the * affair ¦ ..., you KNOW.....* (at end of turn)

Lexis [empty]

"Doing words": *Oh. ¦ Well,.. ¦ So,.. ¦ How about..? ¦ .., then. ¦ You know,.. ¦ See,..¦ Say,... ¦ I mean,...*

Confirmation check:

propositional content: (is that/am I) right? *What Mom and Dad don't know won't hurt'em, right?*

speech act: OK?/(all) right? *No more monkey business, right?*

context/inference: [tag]/huh? *Kid watches a lot of TV does he? ¦ Pretty scary, huh?*

negative questions:

Why *n't ...? : *Why aren't you at work?*

*n't ...?: *Aren't you excited to see Uncle Max?*

C: **Beyond Words:**

Intonation : *Oh No! It's ROSALYN! – OUR BABY SITTER?! (+paraling) ¦ Gosh Dad, (+paraling)*

Contrastive stress: *this is MY room ¦ Oh Geez, RUN!! ¦ suppose some kid TRIED to be good,...*

Sounds: *THBBPTHBPT: ¦ Uh-oh. ¦ mhm ¦ hmmm ¦ AAUGH!! ¦ TA-DAA! ¦ GLOMP!*

Figure 2. Categorizing the language of *Calvin & Hobbes*

AND THIS IS MY ROOM, UNCLE MAX. I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE SLEEPING, BUT IT SURE ISN'T HERE.
GOTCHA NICE ROOM
THIS IS HOBBES. I WOULDN'T GET TOO CLOSE IF I WAS YOU.
DON'T WORRY HE LOOKS LIKE A FIERCE ONE
YEP. MANDIBLES OF DEATH. THAT'S WHAT HE'S GOT.
.. AND A KILLER'S EYE. YOU CAN TELL. I.. I THINK I'LL GO DOWNSTAIRS.
OL' UNCLE MAX SEEMS PRETTY SHARP. HARD TO BELIEVE HE'S RELATED TO DAD.
"A KILLER'S EYE," HE SAID! WOW! I WONDER WHICH ONE!
HEY! HEY, KID. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
I'M GOING THROUGH YOUR LUGGAGE. WHAT'S IT LOOK LIKE I'M DOING?
DID MOMMY AND DADDY RAISE YOU THEMSELVES, OR DID THEY JUST UNTIE YOU FOR MY VISIT?
DIDN'T YOU BRING ME A PRESENT? I CAN'T FIND ONE ANYWHERE
UNCLE MAX, LOOK! I'LL SHOW YOU A MAGIC DISAPPEARING TRICK!
OK, FIRST I'LL NEED AN ORDINARY TWENTY-DOLLAR BILL.
HOW ABOUT IF I LEND YOU A NICKEL INSTEAD?
NO, IT WORKS MUCH BETTER WITH A TWENTY. -OR A FIFTY, IF YOU HAVE ONE.
I TAKE IT YOU THINK YOUR OL' UNCLE MAX IS A LOW-WATT BULB.
WAIT, DID DAD TELL YOU HOW THIS WORKS?

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Figure 3. Max

Hasan, 1976), such as *it, this* or *that* don't refer as strictly as they should and

2) *ELLIPSIS and BLENDS*.

[Figure 3. here (Max)]

At a loose reference level, in this set of strips *it* refers to 'nothing': *What's it look like I'm doing* (Strip 2/ Frame 3); or to a distant referent: *No it works much better with a twenty* (*it* = 'the trick'), Strip 3/Frame 3; and *that's what* 'ungrammatical!y' refers to *mandibles of death* (Strip 1/ Frame 2).

Similarly we have the ellipted forms: *Nice room.* (for *What a nice room*!) in Strip 1/ Frame 1 and *What's it look like I'm doing?* (for *What does it look like I'm doing?*) in Strip 2/ Frame 2. This, incidentally, gives students a great deal of trouble, because they expect *is* or *has* to be the ellipted form based on what they have been taught to expect when encountering *'s*.

And then there are blended forms: *Gotcha.*(= *I got your drift*) in Strip 1/ Frame1. You will also encounter *Outta my WAY!*, (= *Get out of my WAY!*) and *Leggo* (= *Let go*) in the next set of strips.

At a second level, there are expressions where what can be recovered expresses an **attitude**, **positioning** the speaker *vis-à-vis* what s/he is saying[1]. These are marked [+ I] in Figure 2.

MOM WON'T LET US GO TO THE MOVIE WITH THEM, SO I GUESS WE'RE ON OUR OWN TONIGHT.
CAN WE WATCH TV?
WHAT MOM AND DAD DON'T KNOW WON'T HURT 'EM, RIGHT?
IN FACT, AFTER THEY LEAVE, LET'S GET IN THE OTHER CAR AND LEARN TO DRIVE!
OH BOY! I GET TO BEEP THE HORN, OK?
HEY, THERE'S A TEEN-AGER COMING UP THE DRIVE. OH NO! IT'S ROSALYN!
OUR BABY SITTER?! WHAT'S SHE DOING HERE? DON'T MOM AND DAD TRUST US?! QUICK, HIDE!!
CALVIN? ARE YOU IN THERE? C'MON OUT AND WE'LL MAKE SOME POPCORN.
CALVIN? ..OH BROTHER..
I SEE YOU, CALVIN! C'MON BACK INSIDE!
NO WAY, LADY! IF YOU WANT US, YOU'LL HAVE TO CATCH US!
OH GEEZ. RUN! SHE'S WEARING CLEATS!
OUTTA MY WAY! OUTTA MY WAY!
LET'S GO! BACK IN THE HOUSE! NO MORE MONKEY BUSINESS, ALL RIGHT?
PHOOEY.
IT'S MY JOB TO WATCH YOU AND THAT'S WHAT I'M GOING TO DO, EVEN IF I HAVE TO STRAP YOU TO A CHAIR.
GOT IT?
JAWOHL, MEIN FÜHRER!
CARE TO REPEAT THAT LITTLE COMMENT?
I SAID I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE. LEGGO.

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Figure 4. Rosalyn

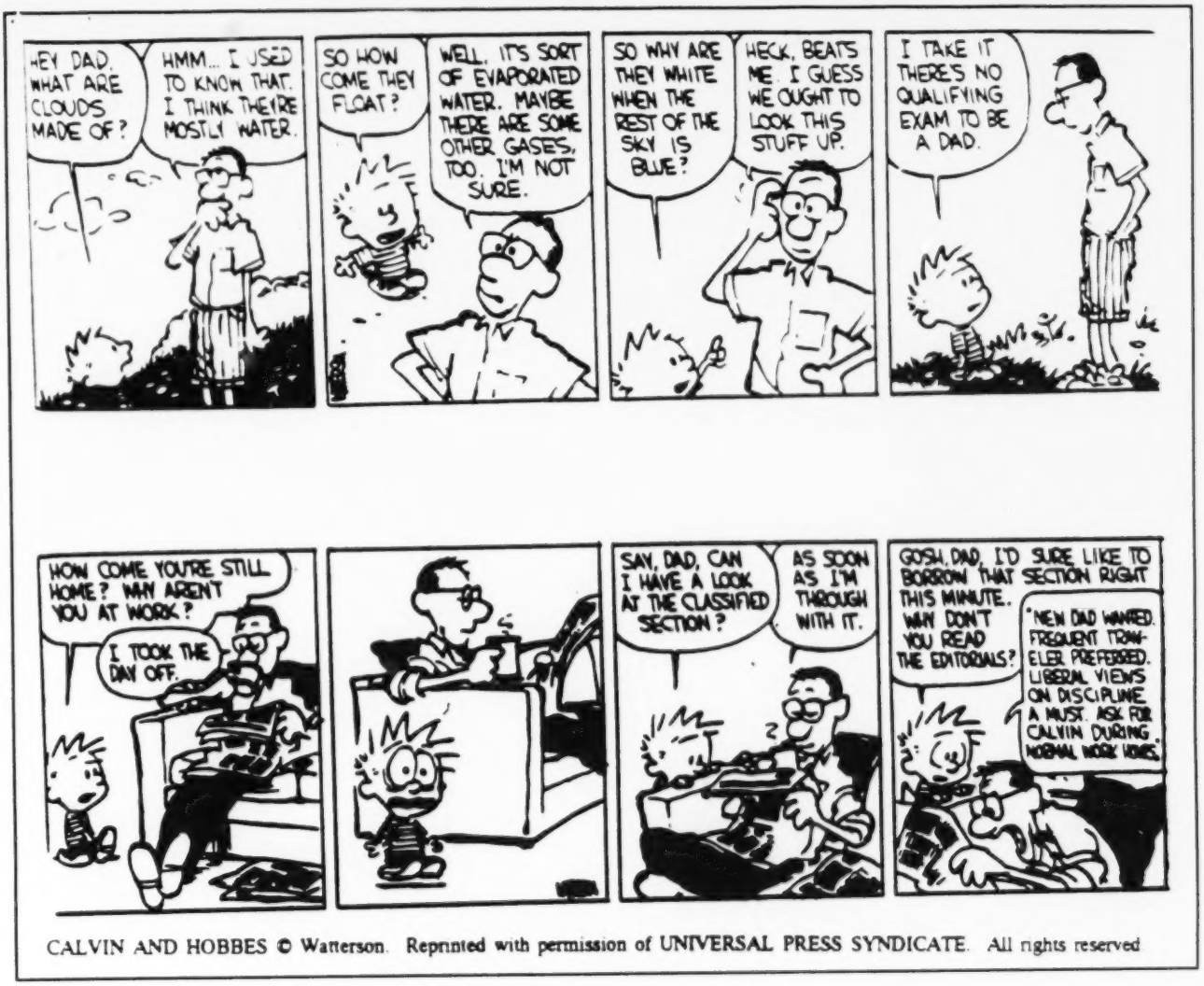
HEY DAD. WHAT ARE CLOUDS MADE OF?
HMM... I USED TO KNOW THAT. I THINK THEY'RE MOSTLY WATER.
SO HOW COME THEY FLOAT?
WELL, IT'S SORT OF EVAPORATED WATER. MAYBE THERE ARE SOME OTHER GASES, TOO. I'M NOT SURE.
SO WHY ARE THEY WHITE WHEN THE REST OF THE SKY IS BLUE?
HECK, BEATS ME. I GUESS WE OUGHT TO LOOK THIS STUFF UP.
I TAKE IT THERE'S NO QUALIFYING EXAM TO BE A DAD.
HOW COME YOU'RE STILL HOME? WHY AREN'T YOU AT WORK?
I TOOK THE DAY OFF.
SAY, DAD, CAN I HAVE A LOOK AT THE CLASSIFIED SECTION?
AS SOON AS I'M THROUGH WITH IT.
GOSH, DAD, I'D SURE LIKE TO BORROW THAT SECTION RIGHT THIS MINUTE. WHY DON'T YOU READ THE EDITORIALS?
"NEW DAD WANTED. FREQUENT TRAVELER PREFERRED. LIBERAL VIEWS ON DISCIPLINE A MUST. ASK FOR CALVIN DURING NORMAL WORK HOURS."
CALVIN AND HOBBES © Watterson. Reprinted with permission of UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE. All rights reserved

Figure 5. Dad

IT'S GREAT TO SEE YOU, MAX! IT SEEMS LIKE AGES SINCE YOU'VE BEEN HERE.
I'LL SAY.
I DIDN'T THINK IT HAD BEEN SO LONG, UNTIL I SAW CALVIN. THIS GUY HAS REALLY GROWN.
SO KID, WHAT DO YOU SAY?
I SAY YOU'D BETTER WATCH YOUR STEP, 'CAUSE I'VE GOT A LIVE, MAN-EATING TIGER AT HOME, AND IF I SO MUCH AS WINK, HE'LL RIP YOUR LUNGS OUT.
CUTE KID, BRO.
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Figure 6. Max Again

[Figure 4. here (Rosalyn)]

These are:

Mitigators: implying that the speaker is only partially committed to the truth of what s/he 's saying: *I guess* (but I could be wrong.) Strip 1/ Frame 1

Comments: Reactions to a situation, ranging from general, strong surprise (*GEEZ!!* –Strip 2/ Frame 4), through glee: (*Oh Boy!* – Strip 1 / Frame 3), to dismay (...*Oh Brother*.. – Strip 2/ Frame 2 : note the intonation curves), passing through unhappy surprise (*Oh No!* – Strip 1/ Frame 4) to disgusted frustration (*Phooey*. – Strip 3/ Frame 1).

[Figure 5. here (Dad)]

Opinions: Strongly held; not necessarily true, but definitely held to be so... *I take it there's no qualifying exam*.... (Strip 1/ Frame 4)

'Synonyms': *How come?* and *Why?* differ in the amount of surprise in the context. In strip 1 / Frames 1 & 2, *How come?* marks the surprise in frame 1, while *why?* continues the interrogation in frame 2. Elsewhere in the book *yeah*, *yup*, and *you bet!* vary in the intensity of the agreement, while *Heck no!*, *Forget it!* and *No way!* imply different kinds of "NO!" (as a friend of mine put it, "These are all *no* with an attitude!")

[Figure 6. here (Max again)]

Lexical Phrases: (Nattinger and DeCarrico, 1992.) In Strip 1/ Frame 1, *It's great to see you, Max!* and *It seems like ages since you've been here*, as well as *I'll say,* and *What do you say?* – are examples of sentences which are routinely said thousands of times in the same situation In fact most of Figure 6 is a routine (a ritual, even) rather than an information exchange (which is what makes Calvin's reply so surreal....)

B: "Words"

The second major category of speech phenomena has do to with words, rather than text. First, there is a great deal of **General lexis** use in spoken discourse. General lexemes, (primarily verbs, or a verbal context) are relatively few in number, have an abstract meaning, and so allow the listener considerable latitude for interpretation according to context.[2] Probably the easiest example to illustrate this kind of lexis is the verb *[GET]*. *[GET]* has a basic, abstract meaning of: ***Somebody [DO] something, and <u>as a result</u> there [BE] a new state.*** Other general lexemes include *[LET], [TURN], [MAKE], [TAKE],* and *[UP], [OUT]*[3]. One step beyond general lexis comes **vague lexis** (Channell (1994): words like *stuff/ ..., and stuff/ the thing/* non-referential *that/the * incident/*final position *you know*....., words which provide the listener with the opportunity to provide or complete meaning in the given context (no latitude of interpretation here; the listener is to provide **all** the information the speaker wants inferred).

THIS SANTA CLAUS STUFF BOTHERS ME _ ESPECIALLY THE JUDGE AND JURY BIT.
WHO APPOINTED SANTA? HOW DO WE KNOW HE'S IMPARTIAL? WHAT CRITERIA DOES HE USE FOR DETERMINING GOOD AND BAD?
AND WHAT ABOUT EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES? KIDS SHOULD HAVE THE BENEFIT OF LEGAL COUNSEL, DON'T YOU THINK?
YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT THE SALAMANDER INCIDENT, AREN'T YOU?
TEMPORARY INSANITY! THAT'S ALL IT WAS!
CALVIN AND HOBBES © Watterson. Reprinted with permission of UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE. All rights reserved
THIS WHOLE SANTA CLAUS THING JUST DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
WHY ALL THE SECRECY? WHY ALL THE MYSTERY? IF THE GUY EXISTS, WHY DOESN'T HE EVER SHOW HIMSELF AND PROVE IT?
AND IF HE DOESN'T EXIST, WHAT'S THE MEANING OF ALL THIS?
I DUNNO. ISN'T THIS A RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY?
YEAH, BUT ACTUALLY, I'VE GOT THE SAME QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD.

Figure 7. Christmas

[Figure 7 here. (Christmas)]

In these Christmas strips, the *Santa Claus stuff* is never made explicit, while *the salamander incident* is never described[4]. Given the context, the reader is expected to provide all the details. Hence the humor, given what the reader knows about Calvin and his capacity for mischief. Students invariably do not understand how far THEY must provide the details, and fail to see anything funny until this is made explicit to them.

All of these lexical forms go hand in hand with **Graphic conventions** (underlining, heavier/larger letters) which illustrate how word stress is often used for contrast. Again, students have a really hard time dealing with this aspect of the text. They are so fixated on the words, that stress goes right by them.

Finally, even lower down the meaning scale, comes **"empty" lexis**: words used for "doing English", (signals about how what is to come or what has been said are to be interpreted). For example, in Figure 6. (Max again), Strip 1/ Frame 3, *So,* marks the following utterance as offering a new topic. This use of language has been described by Blakemore (1987), and especially by Schiffrin (1987), who describes such discourse markers as *the **contextual coordinates** of talk*. Other words that function this way: *well, I mean, you know*.

C: "Non-words

The final aspect of spoken language which is given scant or no place in ESL course books is the use of **non-words** which carry meaning purely through intonation and/or body language, words such as *uh-huh, hmph, mhm, augh!*, and

IS THIS MY PLACE? CAN'T I SIT OVER THERE? I WANT TO SIT NEXT TO UNCLE MAX. CAN I? PLEASE? PLEASE?
OK, GO AHEAD. MOVE YOUR CHAIR OVER.
YOU SHOULD BE FLATTERED, MAX. CALVIN ASKED TO SIT BY YOU TONIGHT.
HEY, THAT'S SWEET.
THBBPTHBPT!
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Figure 8. THBBPTHBPT!

(Figure 8. here. (THBPTHPT!!)]

Teaching with the comic book.

A caveat and a definition.

The previous section described in a rather cursory way, some of the aspects of spoken discourse which are rarely treated in mainstream ESL text books. Some of theses aspects have been documented by applied linguists, in greater or lesser detail (and have been credited as such), while others are my own intuitive groupings gleaned from a five-year continued study of a small corpus of *Calvin & Hobbes* comic books[5]. I would not go so far as to claim that the aspects I have described are anything more than one way, one of many ways, indeed, of describing spoken English. I WOULD, however, claim that such a description has great pedagogical merit as it provides a principled starting point from which to help students to see English differently, and so start building a PERSONAL grammar. This cursory skeleton of an 'alternative' grammar is essentially a *protogrammar*, a grammar that goes beyond the well-documented list of structures the student has learned, into the rather murkier areas of interaction, which the student has never considered. It is a *proto*-grammar, because, although explicit, (at least in the first stages) it presents students with categories that are permanently provisional - it seeks to encourage uncertainty and flexibility rather than certainty and rules. Indeed, as new facts are introduced from the language data (in this case, the comic book), it doesn't take long for students to start challenging, adapting or collapsing these categories into categories which are more meaningful for them, ordering this authentic English, not only by STRUCTURE ("grammar"), but also by EFFECT (a pragmatic grammar).

Methodology

In the context of the protogrammar it becomes clear that what is important is not so much getting language into students' heads, but rather getting them to learn **how to look at it and classify it for themselves**. Michael Lewis (1993) describes a learning situation which informs much of what I do in class. He writes:

> *True learning seems to result from a continuous symbiotic relationship between experience, reflection on that experience, and eventual holistic internalization of it.... Learning is essentially **provisional** and **cyclical,** based on endlessly repeating the cycle Observe (O) — Hypothesise (H) — Experiment (E).*
>
> ***(p. 55–56 emphasis added)***

This is shown in figure 9.

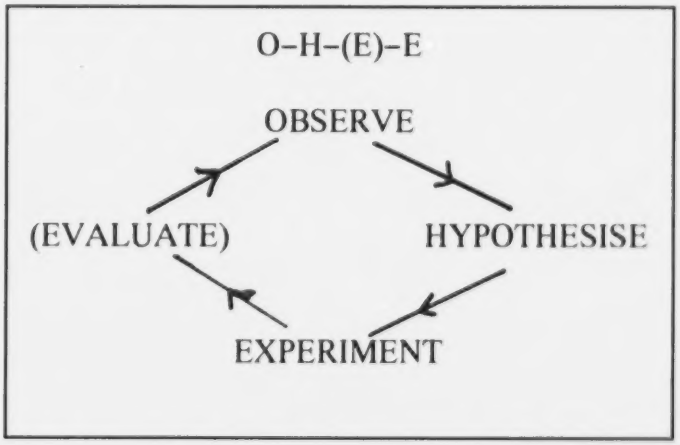

Figure 9. O–H–(E)–E (after Lewis, 1993)

Notice the fourth step, which students have found necessary, that of evaluating the results of the experiment before going on to begin the cycle again.

Needless to say this is quite different from the system my students are used to. In that system, a teacher **presents a structure** (a bit of language) which students then **practice** before moving on to full **production** of that bit. The cycle repeats itself with new bits of language being fed to the students in a linear fashion. As I said earlier, my students are already familiar with that. They can quote the rules and do the sentence combining with facility, but they still struggle with text in English. Through *Yukon Ho!*, they are offered an alternative to complement what they have already acquired. Much of the methodology capitalizes on the fact that the text is both **authentic** and **extended**.

[Figure 10. around here. (Teaching the lang of C&H)]

First and foremost, the key to using Calvin and Hobbes has been **REGULARITY**. Since the language is authentic, it is not a sequential accretion of structures; students need to be exposed to it as much as possible, so as to become aware of the underlying regularities in it. The more students see of the text, the more familiar those regularities become. The teacher's role in this has been to raise and maintain awareness of pragmatic forms, first by presentation of 'other' categories, (if you don't recognize that there is something else, how can you hope to see it?) and later by intensive questioning, to keep students refining and redefining what they are looking at. At a later stage, towards the end of the semester, the students are asking the questions for themselves; the learning is no longer in my hands.

[Figure 11. about here (Far from home)]

Teaching with the comic book.

1. **REGULARITY.**
Language is authentic, not sequentially graded; students need frequent exposure to appreciate the repetitious nature of the language. The more students see the text, the more familiar the underlying regularities become.

2. **AWARENESS RAISING AND MAINTENANCE**, rather than **TEACHING**. (Lewis *O–H–E*).
Teacher role: initial presentation of **concepts** rather than form, followed by intensive questioning to elicit **forms that fit concepts**. Class heuristics. *Going through the words to the language.*

2a. **TRANSLATION OF EFFECT:**
By puzzling out the effect of a lexical string, students are searching for coordinates for a **pragmatic mapping** of L2 on L1.
Teacher's role: Pragmatic questioner:
– *WHY does the character say X*, rather than *WHAT does X mean?* (tying the utterance to the context)
– *What is the character thinking?* (focus on paralinguistics)> *How will this affect the way s/he says the words?*
– *How is this said?* (emotional/contrastive stress markers)
– *What's the opposite of what s/he is saying?* (opposite **effect**). *I guess* [NP][BE][adj] vs [NP][BE] *SO* [adj]
– *What's the new state after get?*
– *Why **Oh**,.. and not **Well**,..?*
– *Why are prepositions there?* (why *eat **up***, and not just *eat?*)
– *Is this language useful/not useful?* – **high generative power** *vs* **low generative power** (Lewis)
– *What's another way to say that? How would that change what s/he says?*

2b. **THE HABIT SETS IN.**
Questions & translation keep the pragmatic aspects of language in the mind. Over time, the habit sets in; language is not so much presented and re–presented as recycled subconsciously. Constant (guided) Observation, leads to articulated Hypothesis and Evaluation. Students make meaning.

3. **RECYCLE, REFLECT, RE–EVALUATE.**
Grids and exercise types to recycle language : periodically, students complete them to **update** their grammars as they come across new examples or exceptions.

Figure 10. Teaching the language of *Calvin & Hobbes*

Far From Home

A: *Scusi, signor* uhmm this chair free?
B: Sure. Go right ahead.
A: Well, I'll be.. You're AMERICAN!
B: That's right, from New York. Bill Johnson.
A: Fred Levy. Wow! Am I PLEASED to see YOU! It's good to hear an American accent for a change.
A: Yeah; and don't I know it! Would you like to sit down awhile?
B: Thanks, that'd be great.
A: So Bill, what brings YOU to Santa Flora?
B: Business. I sell cars over here. How about YOU?
A: I'm at a conference here, you know, over at the Gran' Palazzo.
B: Oh. Right! Isn't that the ASFP conference?
A: You got it! And, can you believe it, I'm the only English speaker there!
B: Really? that must be difficult. Oh. Would you like a drink?
A: Thanks. Do they have beer? That'd be great.
B: So you're alone here, then?
A: Well, actually I'm NOT. My secretary's here, too, but she's .....

****

A: *Scusi, signor* uhmm this chair free?

B: ..... Go ..... ahead.

A: ....., I'll be! You're AMERICAN!

B: That's right, from New York. Bill Johnson.

A: Fred Levy. .....! .... PLEASED to see YOU! It's good to hear an American accent for a change.

A: ....., ...'... I know it! Would you like to sit down awhile?

B: Thanks, ...'... be great.

A: ..... Bill, what brings YOU to Santa Flora?

B: Business. I sell cars over here. .... YOU?

A: .....'... .... conference here; ...., over at the Gran' Palazzo.

B: ..... Right! .....'.... that the ASFP conference?

A: ....! ....., can you believe it, I'm the only English speaker there!

B: Really? that must be difficult. ..... Would you like a drink?

A: Thanks. Do they have beer? That'd be great.

B: ..... you're alone here, ...?

A: ....., ... I'm NOT. My secretary's here, too, but she's .....

Figure 11. *Far from home.*

Early in the semester, students are given the dictation: *Far from Home*, (Figure 11), normal speed, blends, ellipsis and all. After the dictation, students are given the text, and asked to comment on why some words are in capitals. From this step (introduction of stress as a message carrier), it's a (fairly) simple step to consider the functions of: *So, Wow!, Can you believe it?* and *am I PLEASED to see YOU!* Words and expressions are then entered into the "Doing Words" sheet (Figure 12.)

[Figure 12. about here (Doing Words)]

Homework is then a translation of the first six strips in *Yukon Ho!*. Generally, the next morning, students are dispirited, as they realize the difficulty of doing what had always been easy for them; when they translate the words, they still can't make sense of what is being said by the characters. At this point students are made aware that translation of Calvin and Hobbes is not so much a translation of "meaning" but of **effect** (*Why form X, and not form Y*, rather than *What does X mean?*)

About this time we throw out the bilingual dictionary, and start working with a corpus based English dictionary of synonyms; *The Longman Language Activator*. (It's the only one of its kind that I know of for ESL students, but be wary. It's big, confusing can be frustrating to work with at times) Every night from then on, students translate two or three pages of text (an average of 100–150 words) into L1. Why translate? Two reasons;

a) students will do it anyway – why not capitalize on a strategy they are already using?

"DOING" WORDS

OPINIONS:		
REACTIONS:	1:SURPRISE	
	2:ANGER	
	3:FRUSTRATION	
	4:JOY	
	5:DISBELIEF	
	6:ACKNOWLEDGE NEWS	
SIGNALS:	1:NEW TOPIC – OFFER	
	2:INVITATION TO TOPIC	
	3:TOPIC TAKOVER	
	4:CONTINUE TOPIC	
	5:RETURN TO TOPIC	
	6:RECAP TOPIC	
	7:LISTEN TO THIS	
CONFIRMATION CHECKS:	1:WORDS	
	2:ACTION	
	3:CONTEXT	
	4:"I THINK"	

Figure 12. Doing Words

and, far more importantly,

b) by puzzling out the effect of a lexical string, students are having to search for a **pragmatic mapping** of L1 on L2. All problematic language is discussed and elaborated upon the following morning in class. Often one student will disagree with another student's translation where no such translation exists in the bilingual dictionary, which further refines the pragmatic mapping process. The teacher's job is to keep asking the difficult questions: not ***WHAT*** *does X mean?*, but rather ***WHY*** *did the character say it?* or *What would a similar character say in a similar context in* ***your*** *country?*

Other useful close question types are:

– *Is the word useful/not useful?* (Lewis sets up the distinction between lexis with high generative power and collocational range, and lexis with high information and low generative power or collocational range. *Haemoglobin*, or *Down in the Dumps* are much less useful to students than *get/* or *be in the way*)

– *What is the character thinking?* (look at the paralinguistics), and will this affect the way s/he says the words? (e.g. [Figure 5. Strip 2/ Frame2] *Say, Dad...*)

– *How is this said?* (look at stress markers and capitalized words)

– *What's the opposite of what s/he is saying?* (the opposite of *I guess* is....?)

– *What's the new state after* ***get****?*

– *Why* ***Oh****, and not* ***Well****,? / Why* ***hmph*** *and not* ***sheesh****?*

– *What do the prepositions mean?* (eg why *eat* ***up*** , and not just *eat*?)

– *What's another way to say that? How does that change the meaning?* (e.g *What happens*

to the effect of the question, if you replace ***what if*** *with* ***say..*** *or* ***supposing...****?*)

All these questions keep the pragmatic aspects of the language in the students' mind as they translate regularly. Over time, the habit sets in, and they ask themselves the questions subconsciously. It's not so much the presentation or practice of bits of language as much as the **increasing familiarity** with ALL of the language, a constant cycle of Observation, Hypothesis, Experimentation, Evaluation, Observation, Hypothesis, Experimentation and RE-evaluation (*how have the rules I've been operating under hold up to the new data?*)

In this paper, I have attempted to show one way of helping students gain a pragmatic awareness of English. It is not THE method for teaching English, nor is it a peripheral approach to teaching English. It is a principled approach to raising students' awareness to much of the ambiguity, vagueness and downright sloppiness of spoken English. Rather than presenting this as something to be deplored and eradicated, I have proposed a route by which students can begin to make sense of what surrounds them in the streets, and as they gain personal insights to make tentative hypotheses about how they can begin to profit from and use that sloppiness. As they progress through the institute and come in contact with more and more English, students invariably tell me that they continue to ask the same questions I forced on them when they were with me. In short, they have become more active language **learners**, rather than **students waiting to be taught**. Isn't this what learning is all about?

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NOTES:

1. As I make clear later this is very much a nonce ordering of *some* aspects of spoken English; there are probably as many ways of dividing up the discourse as there are attitudes to express. For example, what I categorize as **general** lexis could well subsume what I later (after Channell, 1994) refer to as **vague** lexis. I chose to make separate categories, since *stuff* and *the * incident* require minimally more work for the listener to process than *[GET]* which already has a little meaning emnbedded in it. See my description of these categories later.

2. I am indebted to Perkins (1983) for the idea of a hierarchy of negotiable, generalized lexis becoming progressively marked as meaning is required to be more explicit. Though his chief concern is in the expression of modality, I have expanded the idea to all lexis in spopken discourse. A speaker will typically choose the form which requires the least effort for a maximum pragmatic effect in terms of the context he or she is speaking in. So, given the choice between: *Here!, over here, get over here!, come (over) here!*, and *run/look/move (over) here*, a speaker will choose whatever suits the context best, from *Here!+ paralinguistic signal*, where the important message is for something to happen *here* (either *you* or *that thing in your hand must come here*, or *you must look here*), to *over here!*, where the person addressed is not in the same *here* as the speaker, to *Get over here!*, where the doing of an action is made explicit (= *do something so that afterwards you are over here*) to *come over here/come here*, where the direction of the action itself is made explicit, in contrast to other, more precise actions, e.g. *move/run/walk/hop,* and so on. Blakemore (1987) considers the motivations behind such activity in detail.

3. See Lakoff and Johnson (1980) for a description of how prepositions/particles gain general meaning through metaphoric extension. As a simple example, the particle *[UP]*, which serves as a 'completely' intensifier as in verbs like *eat up, burn up, screw up*, can be traced to the idea that things that are full (and therefore complete) tend to go upward as they fill up. The idea of *completeness = [UP]* then got transferred to many actions which could be completed, and so *[UP]* became an optional intensifying particle for the verbs used to describe them.

4. Notice that while *incident* is vague lexis (= *something happened*), *accident* is an example of general lexis. While, indeed, something happened (listener to provide all information about that), there is the added information that the outcome of what happened was **bad**. The listener has marginally less work to do to make the word fit the context. By the same token *a * (e.g tragic) turn of events* implies that something happened and because it happened the outcome was * (e.g. tragic).

5. Beyond *Yukon Ho!*, I have spent time studying two other volumes by Watterson: *Something under the bed is drooling* (Watterson, 1989), and *Scientific progress goes "boink"*, (Watterson, 1991).